

Historical Society of Palm Desert

P. O. Box 77, Palm Desert, CA 92261 NEWSLETTER May, 1983



FOUNDER'S DAY

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Henderson have extended an invitation to Historical Society members and friends to visit their home and Galleria at 73-597 Pinyon on Sunday, May 15th, between 2 and 5 P.M., this being the anniversary of our Founder's Day. This will give you an opportunity to view Mr. Henderson's collection of memorabilia of his illustrious career, not only as the pioneer and founding father of Palm Desert, but of his past aviation history as well. Refreshments will be served. RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY. Please call the office, 346-6113, between 9 and 12 weekday mornings. Donation \$5. per person.

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS:

A hearty THANKS to all those members who attended our annual luncheon at the Monterey Country Club on March 19th. It was a pleasure to see such a fine turn-out, to witness so many members enjoying the day together at this informative meeting. We especially wish to thank Mr. and Mrs. Phil Boyd for being so gracious in their attendance and being recognized by this Society as true "Pioneers" of this Valley. Thanks also to Mrs. Dorothy Dybalski of Anaheim Savings and Loan and to Mr. Ole Nordland for their presentations and support. Each member of the Commission contributed to the success of this event: Anne Carpenter with her Welcoming address; Pat Anderson with her Treasurer's report and comments on the Riverside Symposium; Evelyn Young, who gave a report on the La Quinta Hotel; Ed Mullins on our progress of the Historic Ordinance. .and Yours Truly on the activity and events that your Society is so involved with. Again. . .Thanks to one and all who participated and attended.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

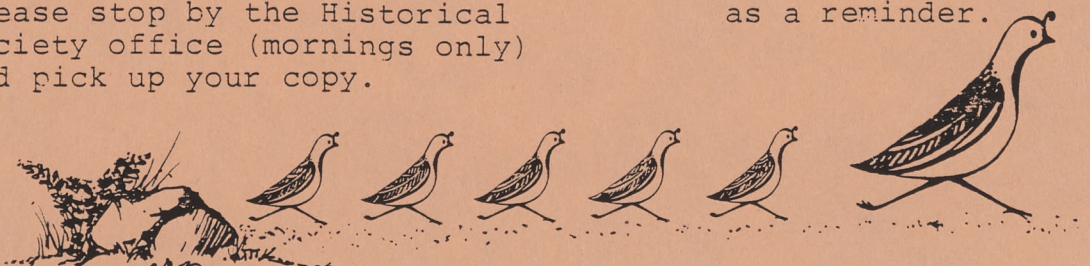
Oral History Project: Please. . .we do need your story!!! To those of you who have not as yet been interviewed, we would like to set up and appointment to meet with you, either here in the Society office, or at your home, office. . .wherever! We wish to record your Palm Desert/Cove Community History. When the interview is completed, a transcript is typed up, and then returned to you for editing. Once edited and approved, it is then again re-typed and put on permanent file here in our archives. What a wonderful source of information this will be for future historians. So PLEASE, may we hear from those of you who have not as yet had the opportunity of adding your history to our records.

NEW ROSTERS:

The new membership rosters that were distributed at the Annual Luncheon to those who attended, are available to all members. Please stop by the Historical Society office (mornings only) and pick up your copy.

REMINDER:

Your Annual membership dues are payable now. For those who have not sent in their check, we enclose a statement as a reminder.



June 4, 1975

Only Harry Could Sell Petrified Lightning

The Coachella Valley has had lots of "characters" in recent years. Fig Tree John, the eccentric Cabuilla Indian chief down near today's Valerie Jean, was one. Another was Cabot Yerxa who built a pueblo at Desert Hot Springs. (With a name like Cabot Yerxa can destiny deny him fame, however local?)

For me, Harry Oliver was THE valley character. The commander of Old Fort Oliver in Thousand Palms was the complete oddball. He was a happy recluse who escaped from Hollywood to down-wind Thousand Palms. His adobe abode was known nation-wide.

Once one of the top stage set designers in Hollywood, Harry said to himself that Hollywood was all phoney, so he came to the desert to be corny all by his own.

Those who knew Harry can recall his beat-up black slouch hat, his old coracob pipe, the Colonel Sanders white hair, the neat goatee, and always the twinkle in his eyes. Harry was the first to admit that he was spoofing.

Harry Oliver's Desert Rat Scrap Book was the old man's hobby. This odd pamphlet — a delight to those of us who used to enjoy W.C. Fields and the Marx Brothers — was published on an irregular schedule, depending on Harry's supply of dimes. Underneath the masthead of the Scrap Book was a line, "Only One Lousy Thin Dime."

When I owned Desert Printers in Palm Desert we jobbed Harry's Desert Rat Scrap Book. He insisted on a heavy — and expensive — paper stock. He was hooked on one of the lines he always printed on the first page: "Only Newspaper You Can Open in the Wind." He talked about the magic of the desert — mirages and singing sands.

Harry once said anything can happen in the desert and frequently does. He wrote of petrified lightning and the desert's phantom shade.

Collecting our printing fee from Harry was always a pleasant task in gamesmanship. When I would ask for a part payment on Harry's aging account-due, Harry would promise something within the week.

Sure enough, he'd show up in a few days and then would count out on my desk some \$30 or \$40 of dimes he had picked up on his route around the Salton Sea or elsewhere. He seemed to relish the ritual of paying off his debt a dime at a time. His eyes sparkled as he added up the dollar stacks of 10 dimes each. In the meantime, my bookkeeper winced.

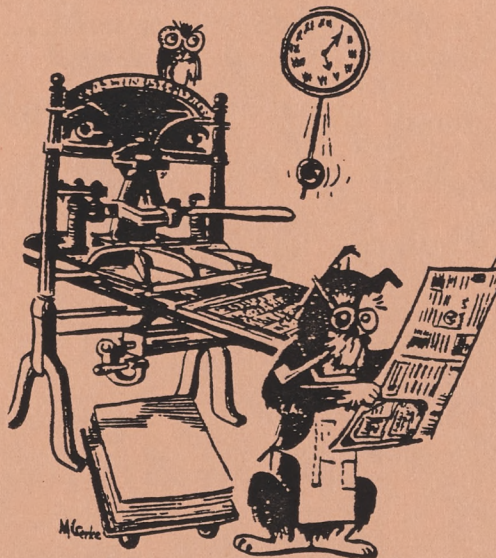
Usually while paying me some dimes, Harry would dream up some preposterous story why Desert Printers should cut his balance by 10 per cent or reduce the printing costs. His flimflam had no logic, as Harry well knew, but I usually gave in.

Well, in the not-so-long-ago people used to buy snake oil, didn't they? All I was doing was buying some of Harry's snake oil!

One of the nicest things about Harry Oliver was that he knew he was a character. He was the first to laugh at some screwball idea he propounded. He loved to obfuscate, to kid, to see humor in what might seem obvious. And one thing about Harry's pen: he never hurt anyone or anything. A very gentle person.

May I recall a couple of my favorite Harry Oliver spoofs?

He had as a constant companion his little mutt Whiskers. This little feist traveled everywhere with Harry and was much a part of Harry as his pipe. Harry decided at one point that Whiskers was going deaf. So, according to Harry's fable, he bought Whiskers a tiny hearing aid. The dog saw the hearing aid, thought it was a peanut, and swallowed it.



Harry then claimed that Whiskers immediately ran under the bed, because the hearing aid magnified Whisker's tummy-mumblings so much he thought it was thunder, which always sent him scurrying for cover!